



Effluent Project with the City of Deer Lodge

Current Status:

In January 2011, letters were sent to the Montana delegation requesting support for the City of Deer Lodge's \$11-16 million dollar conversion to municipal sewage treatment facilities out of the national park site and onto City land owned elsewhere. After good engineering work by HKM, Butte and Morrison-Maierle, Helena, and thorough public process, the City selected a preferred alternative to build a treatment plant on land near the airport, out of the floodplain and off of the park, which the park, DEQ and a number of environmental watchdog groups support. Until the City secures funding, DEQ has issued a waiver, and the park remains the site of the summer effluent dispersal. The park would like to see the 70 acres of lagoons within the park restored to functional wetlands and either federally owned or preferred uses described within a conservation easement. The City's lagoons are within the legislated boundary of the park and were grandfathered in as a non-conforming use in 1972 when the park was established.

Background:

In 1999 the Park entered into a 5 year cooperative agreement with the City of Deer Lodge to disperse sewage effluent on 110 acres of park land. The project was supported by the Tri-State-Water Quality Council-Voluntary Nutrient Reduction Program (VNRP) whose mission it is to reduce point source pollution in the Clark Fork River, specifically during the summer months when Deer Lodge's treated sewage was directly released to the river. The City of Deer Lodge is one of three cities on the Clark Fork that contribute to this problem between Butte and Thompson Falls.

Over \$200,000 in grant money was secured to establish the program and cover 4 years of operating costs. The first 5 year agreement (1999-2004) allowed the City time to work out a permanent solution to an overburdened and outdated wastewater treatment system prior to stricter EPA guidelines anticipated in 2008. The City was cited for numerous violations by DEQ, summer of 2009 and has since accomplished major repairs to mains, hired a full timer grants writer, established a city taxes for annual costs and to qualify for bonding, and developed plans for a compliant, treatment plant.



The park agreed to accept the treated effluent to revitalize a park water right through exchange, and to irrigate fields within the cultural landscape of the Ranch. The agreement specified that pollutants remain below CDC, EPA & OSHA requirements in 11 monitoring wells established for the project. They have, as of the 2010 season reports. However, naturally occurring arsenic has been mobilized and is moving down to the water table as an affect of continuous watering. Two subsequent agreements have been signed to accept the effluent, the most recent will expire in 2013, time needed for the City to fundraise for its preferred alternative. The park negotiated financial arrangements that now split the \$25,000 annual costs, equally.

The park wishes to sunset this arrangement respectfully, giving the City plenty of time to find and fund a better solution, and has been working to do so, since 2005. The program conflicts with national NPS policy and inhibits the City from meeting 2008 EPA/DEQ regulations. In addition, the north pastures no longer need watering as management direction is to restore them to dry, upland pastures, as part of the park's water conservation initiatives.

More Information: Laura Rotegard- Superintendent (406) 846-2070 x 221 www.nps.gov/grko.